

VA**U.S. Department
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News Release

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(202) 461-7600
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Washington, D.C. - When a new millennium begins on January 1, disability checks will keep going to veterans, health-care services in VA facilities will continue without interruption and the processing of claims for veterans benefits will go on without a glitch, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Togo D. West Jr. announced today.

"The start of the new millennium should be an occasion for celebration and thanksgiving," Secretary West said. "At VA, our employees have been working for months to ensure that it isn't a time of apprehension for our nation's veterans."

Secretary West's remarks came as senior VA officials reviewed their efforts to deal with the so-called "Y2K bug," which might cause some computers to misread the date - and hence, to shut down important computer-controlled operations - on January 1 of the year 2000.

"We are ready for Y2K at VA, and we expect no problems," Secretary West said. "We have tested everything we can control. For those things that we cannot control, we will continue working to identify potential problems. VA employees across the nation will be on duty during the New Year's Day holiday to detect and solve any problems that may arise."

VA received two "A's" last week from a U.S. House of Representatives oversight committee grading Y2K efforts government-wide. One of the A's was for VA's overall effort to stamp out the "Y2K bug." The other was for high impact federal program readiness for veterans health and benefits systems.

During the July 4 weekend, VA rolled the clocks forward and processed over \$3.5 billion in mock payments in a simulated January 2000 payment cycle. To ensure no eligible veteran would go without benefits, VA included its partner agencies - the Treasury Department and the Federal Reserve - in the critical test. No Year 2000 problems occurred.

The Year 2000 simulation, coordinated at the Hines (Chicago) VA Data Automation Center, tested VA business functions in the compensation and pension, education, vocational rehabilitation and counseling, and insurance payments systems. Internal settings were moved forward to January 2000 to test new and renovated VA computer applications, platforms, software and hardware.

At the same time, telecommunication linkages between VA computer centers were tested at VA's Hines and Philadelphia Benefits Delivery Centers, Austin Systems Development Center, the St. Louis Regional Office, and the Bay Pines, Fla., VA Medical Center. Telecommunication linkages at the St. Paul, Minn., Debt Management Center were previously tested.

Along with the long-term efforts to identify and repair medical equipment if necessary, VA health care staff has been developing and testing back-up plans in case any Y2K-related glitches do occur. VA health care facilities have tested all independent and integrated electronic systems. All VA medical centers will have conducted an emergency power drill, disconnecting power supplies and operating on emergency power to demonstrate their abilities during a power loss.

Secretary West said, "The effort was complex at times - checking elevators, heating and air conditioning

controls, power supplies, telephone and paging systems. Veterans can depend on VA to deliver benefits and quality health care during the first days of the next century - and well beyond!"